



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR NEWSLETTER *

SEP 1 1954

Dorothy Bendix, Chairman
Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups
Detroit Public Library, Detroit 2, Mich.

AMERICAN LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

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LIBRARY EXHIBIT IS PROOF OF WORKERS' CREATIVITY¹

Once again pioneering in the field of workers' education, the ILGWU, in cooperation with the New York Public Library, is participating in an exhibit called "When Work is Done."

The ILGWU has pioneered in many ways in things great and small. The Educational Department was the first to make over the Mother Goose rhymes and to compile a labor joke book in addition to the more important pioneer "Handbook of Trade Union Methods." The most recent innovation, following the Officers' Qualification Courses, has been the Training Institute,

Now, through "When Work is Done", the union will show the ways in which it serves as an agency to help its members enjoy, creatively and happily, the leisure won by union effort. As the foreword to the program says: "When workers toiled in sweat-shops from sun-up to sun-down, it would have been a cruel joke to talk about how they could express themselves in various forms of art when work was done. Fortunately, we live in a new era. The seven-hour day and the 35-hour work week present to the wage workers of our great city an opportunity to make things of joy and beauty and to experience creative expression. Indeed—particularly if their work is monotonous—they have a need in their leisure hours to express the instinct of craftsmanship. Men and women do not live by bread alone. Books are bread, and men's and women's brains and souls need nourishment as well as their bodies.

* The material published in the NEWSLETTER and the opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the policy or views of the ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups.

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"The Public Library has become closely associated with the desire of the workers for more knowledge--knowledge to create for themselves full and happy lives. Therefore, it is most appropriate that the Public Library serve as the gracious host for this exhibit of the work of trade union members.

"The citizens of New York, through this exhibit, will learn more about what is happening in the workers' lives and the way in which they are utilizing, under the auspices of their unions, the leisure which those unions have won for them. They will see that the unions, while safeguarding the basic matters of wages, hours and conditions, are also eager to help their members to develop their capacities.

"For the union members, we hope this exhibit will serve as a stimulus to use the agencies which are theirs and to make themselves healthy, happy human beings who, with their capacity for love, joy, admiration and creativity, are the basic wealth of our community."

The other unions which are cooperating include the Photo Engravers, the Teachers Guild and the Women's Trade Union League. John Mackenzie Cory, chief of the Circulation Department, will join with Vice Pres. Julius Hochman, chairman of the ILGWU Education Committee, in opening the exhibit on Jan. 14 at 7 P.M. Art will be represented by Ernest Fiene, Ben Shan and Leo Lionni. During the week, films will be shown which will deal with various handicrafts. Members of the teaching staff, who include Seth Hoffman, Harry Hoffman, Arturo Sofo, Pearl Ertel and Susan Bull, will help display the paintings and items made by the members. In addition, the union member-artists will be present to explain and describe their work.

The exhibit will be open daily Jan. 14 through 25 from 3 to 9:30 P.M. and Saturday from 9 A.M. to 1 P.M. at Epiphany Library, 228 East 23rd St.

It is expected that this exhibit will be the first of many that will strengthen the close cooperation between the trade unions' educational activity and the services provided by the Public Library.

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"WHEN WORK IS DONE"

by Dorothy Kuhn Oko, in charge of
Library Service to Trade Unions
New York Public Library

The story behind the exhibition of leisure time activities of trade unionists held at one of the branch libraries of The New York Public Library may have many points which will interest all who are concerned with establishing closer relations between libraries and trade unions.

When Mark Starr, Education Director of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, called me last summer to ask if the library would be interested in having an exhibition of the work of their classes in painting, sculpture, and ceramics, I agreed to investigate the possibilities. Knowing that the Central Building offered no facilities for outside exhibitors, I was happy to find that one of our branches had space available for this purpose. The librarian in charge of this branch welcomed the idea, although she had never before had exhibits of any kind.

Since we, in the library, felt that we would not be justified in undertaking such an affair for an individual union, the next step was to find other unions that were running similar classes. This was not so simple. I phoned, wrote, visited and communicated the idea via all the channels I knew to the unions that I believed might be interested in such a project. It soon was plain that no other unions had comparable activities. The next best thing seemed to be to ask each union to sponsor the arts and crafts work of their own members. The only stipulation was that they should be carried on as hobbies, not as professional work.

About two months before the opening date, it seemed that there was not enough interest to warrant going on with the plan. Then, suddenly things began to happen. The Chairman of the Art Society of the New York Photo Engravers Union No. 1, called to say that he had just heard about the exhibition; that the Society would be delighted to arrange a small show at the library. He would merely have to make a selection from the extensive work of their members.

Cara Cook of the New York Teachers' Guild No. 2, American Federation of Teachers, who had been soliciting contributions from her members for some time, began getting quite an interesting variety of pieces. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 3, found that several individuals were ready to contribute some of their own handy work. When this was added to the simple handicraft display of a class recently instituted for one of their shops, they were able to set up a nice show. These, plus a few other promises, tipped the balance in favor of going ahead with the exhibition.

Then began work on the final arrangements in which the help of Mr. Starr and his organization were invaluable. An attractive announcement was printed listing names of sponsoring unions. A statement of the underlying philosophy and a plug for greater use of the library and union educational facilities were also included. Some evening programs to attract larger audiences were also planned. News releases were sent to the press, both public and labor.

As already stated, the room had never been used for exhibitions so that certain necessary physical features were lacking. Picture moldings had to be installed and wall board placed for display purposes. Fortunately the room had excellent lighting and some cases where small objects could be arranged under glass. On the day of installation, the third floor of a Carnegie Library building with only a small book lift almost proved our "Waterloo". But the will of all triumphed.

Soon the space allotted to each union began to fill up, to take form and color. It was exciting to see the exhibitors arrive with their precious burdens. For the most part, the person responsible in each union brought the materials and arranged or helped to arrange the individual exhibit. The name of the sponsoring union was prominently displayed. Names of individual artists were either attached to the individual's work or were listed by number on mimeographed leaflets prepared by the sponsoring organization. In the end, there were eight of these as follows: Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Local 169; Art Society of New York Photo Engravers Union, Local 1; Educational Department of International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 3; National Maritime Union; New York Women's Trade Union League; Registered Nurses' Guild No. 312; A.F.L.; Teachers Guild, No. 2, American Federation of Teachers.

A single entry from the National Maritime Union came in, a week late. The artist was a ship's carpenter who had chanced to see an article in "The Pilot", the union paper. He came all the way from Baltimore in a car into which he had loaded

his works of art. He was overjoyed to find that these could still be included in the show. His beautiful hand-decorated pottery and a delicately carved sailboat were too good to exclude. Other entries ranged from hand-formed pottery to finished pieces of sculpture, from quick pencil sketches to prize winning oils, from braided belts to hand-tooled leather purses, from delicately woven lace collars to crocheted bedspreads. Nothing was too simple to include. Only professional work was ruled out.

On the opening night a small reception was held at which John Mackenzie Cory, Chief of the Circulation Department of the New York Public Library, said a few words of welcome and at which a representative from each union was called upon to respond. By special invitation, several prominent artists were present and they too added a few remarks. The whole was recorded by The Voice of America. On four subsequent evenings films were shown dealing with labor, with arts and crafts and with the Library. Another evening, the Art Editor of Fortune, Mr. Leo Lionni, spoke on the "Art of Seeing".

The most successful program was the "How-to-do-it" night at which teachers and pupils demonstrated various processes. At one table, a leather craft class was at work. At another, painting on metal and other simple handicrafts were being produced. A student from a ceramics class showed how to make a bowl with strips of clay, and at a fourth table, a water color painting was being brought to life. The evening was further enlivened by some numbers sung by the chorus of one of the locals of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The informality of the program and the general arrangement gave people a chance to wander from place to place, to ask about the work and to learn more about opportunities for study. The audience, as well as teachers and pupils, gained much from this interchange.

All told, some six hundred people attended the exhibition. Notice in the general press was very inadequate with the result that the general public knew little about it. The few who came in were much impressed. Members of all unions were much interested. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union which had the largest stake in the enterprise organized groups to come on different evenings. Another year, a more concerted effort will be made to reach a larger public, to have a larger number of trade unions involved and to get greater trade union participation in the whole enterprise. All are already talking about "next year". Both the unions and the library feel that this has been a very rich experience in community planning and in cooperative action.

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NEWS OF GENERAL INTEREST

From A.L.A. Midwinter Meeting in Chicago

The Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups held a business meeting on Feb. 2, 1952, at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. The following points were discussed:

1) Plans were made for the A.L.A. Conference in New York, June 29-July 5, 1952. The Committee will sponsor two meetings, one with union speakers, and the other a discussion meeting with reports from librarians on existing programs and their problems. Details will be announced in a future issue of the NEWSLETTER.

The Committee also decided to have a booth for the display and distribution of pertinent library and union educational materials as it did at the Cleveland

Conference. Later on the Committee will appreciate offers of volunteers to help man the booth.

2) The progress of the pamphlet on library service to labor groups was discussed, and the hope was expressed that it would be ready for submission to the A.L.A. Editorial Committee at the latest by the time of the New York Conference.

3) The need for material - both articles and news items - for the NEWSLETTER was stressed by the editor, and suggestions for future issues were solicited.

There was agreement on the desirability of an index for the first four years of the NEWSLETTER, and the chairman was instructed to investigate the possibility of getting it done.

4) Library cooperation with labor summer schools was discussed, and it was decided to make plans for a selected number of schools well ahead of time so that these projects could be most successful.

5) The Committee decided to follow up a suggestion made by a librarian at an earlier meeting that a suggested list of labor periodicals for small libraries be prepared. The Industrial Relations Center Library of the University of Illinois has been approached and has agreed in the meantime to prepare such a list for the attention of the Joint Committee. It is planned to publish the list in a future issue of the NEWSLETTER.

D.B.

From Boston, Mass.

The Boston Public Library has just issued a new flyer entitled "See what your Library is doing for Labor Groups". It was prepared in time for a two-day display at the Sixth International Convention of the United Wholesale, Retail, and Department Stores Employees Union, CIO, at the Hotel Bradford on Jan. 29 and 30. The Library display was very popular, it was next to the free Coca-Cola booth. As the delegates drank their "cokes", they examined the books and asked questions.

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